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The Chinese Bible Woman

BY MRS. W. B. HAMILTON

Price, 2 cents each; 20 cents a dozen.

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The Chinese Bible Woman

Foreword by a Foreign Secretary

Did you dote on fairy-godmother stories in childhood? and lover-and-his-lass tales in girlhood? and, in maturer life, the love of Mme. de Stael for her daughter? and the joy a master like Arnold takes in his pupil, or the adoration a pupil like Plato has for his teacher?

Turning from such romance, would you dismiss as wholly uninteresting the term *Bible Woman*, and never willingly recall it?

Then you may be just such a stupid, unseeing person as I was before I became acquainted with missionaries by reading their letters and meeting them on furlough. I began by skipping all they said about Bible Women, those uninteresting, tiresome creatures! When it became my pleasant duty to copy letters, I unwillingly, and as rapidly as possible, hurried through the Bible Woman part, to get at the pages that really appealed, such as travel-adventures, local color, "twice-born men," inside views of national politics, character studies of the much-loved natives, and the unconscious heroism of the missionaries themselves.

Soon I became aware that from the point of view of the writers a Bible Woman was the most precious possession, next to her family, that a missionary could have, and, my eyes opening a little farther, I beheld with amazement that the affection of a missionary

for her Bible Woman is a tender, heart-quivering, admiring, leaning love. It is wistful, for it contains a sort of envy without jealousy, as she watches the Bible Woman do easily and naturally the things that the missionary has spent years in being trained to do. She sees the words of her Bible Woman wing straight to the hearts of her hearers, so what wonder is it that the missionary, with all her might, works to multiply and train these invaluable aids. "They must increase," says the missionary, "but I must decrease."

If the missionary feels so tenderly toward her Bible Woman, her companion on many journeys, sharing the discomforts, disappointments, triumphs, despairs, adulations, persecutions, temptations, and all the ups and downs of an itinerating trip, how must the humble Bible Woman feel toward the missionary when, added to all these heart-knitting experiences, is the gratitude she has to the one who rescued her from the appalling terrors of a universe full of "goblins who will get you if you don't watch out!" If the missionary feels that she leans on the Bible Woman, how much more must the latter lean on her missionary! It is a wonderful, helpful friendship. Hand-in-hand, in Christ's name, they go out to live for a month or more in obscure by-ways seldom touched by the outside world. It is a combination camping-trip, exploring expedition, preaching tour, social welfare adventure. Together they are a Children's Bureau, Public Hygiene Department, University Extension Society—all these as by-services almost uncon-

sciously rendered, for underneath and above all is their simple desire to win hearts to Christ. On her return to the Mission Station, the Bible Woman in market-place and hospital, or in homes closed to foreigners, "bridges over the gap 'twixt East and West."

Unhappily, I have never had a chance to interview a *Bible Woman* on this subject, but I *have* questioned a missionary, Mrs. William B. Hamilton, of Shantung, China, and most helpfully did she reply, though without the sparkle and tenderness which I would have got had I taken her unaware and heard her tell what her Bible Woman means to her. Although I, too, had come to feel the romance of the subject, I steeled myself and asked coldly what a Bible Woman was anyway, that all the missionaries should be so praiseful.

"Who is Sylvia, what is she,
That all the *saints* adore her?"

I received the following reply from Mrs. Hamilton, whose dearest work is to train these invaluable aids.

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Bible Woman! What does the name mean? Probably nothing at all to the average reader. Perhaps it suggests a woman going from house-to-house and reading the Bible to those who will listen, and those who are unable to read it themselves. But that is only a part of the work done by these important constituents of the force of every mission station.

"Woman Evangelist"—the name applied to them by the Chinese Church—perhaps better designates the various activities of these workers. They lead meetings of Christian women, teach classes of inquirers, visit women in their homes, and sometimes in the country districts even take part in the preaching at markets and on village streets.

On long tours with the missionary, and sometimes without her, the native woman evangelist endures cold or heat, rain or snow, and the various discomforts of travel, all uncomplainingly. As soon as she arrives at a village, she begins to make friends with the women of the inn, or gathers a group around her on the street, and, without many preliminaries, is soon preaching to them about the true God.

In Women's Hospitals the evangelist does a most important work. She preaches to the crowds awaiting their turn at the daily clinic. She teaches any in-patients who are interested enough to study the "Doctrine." She makes friends with every one, disarming prejudice and giving encouragement and comfort wher-

ever needed. She follows up the patients when they return to their homes, for, though the social visitor in our United States hospitals may be an innovation, she has always been a part of our foreign mission hospitals.* She keeps in touch with the patients in their homes, and thus is often the means of bringing them into the Christian Church.

For the work outlined above, women of various qualifications are needed. In no one person are we likely to find united the Christian grace, the learning, tact, wisdom and the physical endurance that are ideal. In an oriental country, too, a woman must have reached mature years before she can go about in public without endangering her reputation. Most of the older women of the Christian Church have not had the advantages of early training, and their only education is that received in Bible Schools or classes held for limited periods. The demand for better equipped women to work among the higher classes is calling for Bible Schools of a higher grade, where women with a previous training in mission schools can be prepared for this increasingly important work.

Whether known by the familiar term of Bible Woman or as Evangelist, let us hope that these workers will cling close to the ideal embodied in the former name, and be living epistles of the message from the Book of books.

* Also a generation before we thought we had invented Social Settlements they were thriving on the foreign field, for every missionary's home is a Social Settlement — EDITOR